

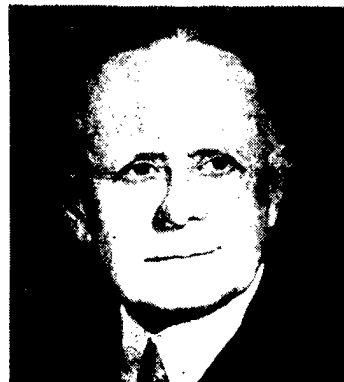
Family Line



Charles de Young founded the San Francisco Chronicle Jan. 16, 1865. He was then 19. The Chronicle has continued in publication and in the ownership and direction of the de Young family for a century.



Meichel H. de Young left high school to join with his brother, Charles, in founding the San Francisco Chronicle a century ago. M. H. de Young—named Meichel for his father and nicknamed Mike—assumed entire Chronicle control when his brother was killed in 1880 and remained publisher until his death in 1925.



George T. Cameron, son-in-law of M. H. de Young, was Chronicle publisher from 1925 until his death in 1955. An industrialist in his own right and publisher on behalf of the four de Young daughters, he became "Uncle George" to Chronicle employees who were scattered globally during World War II.



Charles de Young Thieriot became publisher at 40 to maintain the de Young family direction of the Chronicle which had been long published by M. H. de Young, his grandfather. His brother, too, died—an Andria Doria ship disaster victim. Under his guidance the morning and Sunday daily has enjoyed an amazing rebound.

S. F. Chronicle Saga! On a Borrowed Coin

SAN FRANCISCO

The story of the early days of the *San Francisco Chronicle*, as told by M. H. de Young, 17 years old when he joined his brother, Charles, '19, in the founding a century ago, was uncovered here recently.

Launched January 16, 1865, as the *Dramatic Chronicle*, the newspaper has continued under the ownership of the de Young family and is now published by Charles de Young Thieriot, grandson of the co-founder.

M. H. de Young, named Meichel for his father who died while the family was en route to San Francisco, gives this account of the Chronicle's start:

\$20 Gold Piece

My brother, Charles, started the *Dramatic Chronicle* in 1865 on a borrowed \$20 gold piece.

He set up his office in a job printing shop on Clay St. where he had a sort of desk, room for type and a stone to make up on. The paper was at first little more than a program sheet for various theaters. It was distributed free in the theaters and its revenues came from the theater owners, who paid for this printing of their programs. . . .

"I was a schoolboy at the time in high school. My brother immediately found that he had more work than he could handle alone, so I was drafted.

"Charles went to my mother and said Harry (his middle name) had to be taken out of

school to help. So mother sent me down to join Charles. I was given an interest in the business and a salary. . . .

"I had been connected with a newspaper before that as a kid. Some years prior to the foundation of the Chronicle, when my brother was very much younger, he got out a school paper, *The School Circle*. I used to go down after school and help him.

"I did everything connected with a newspaper. I was telegraph editor, mail clerk and printer; folded papers, carried papers and I set type on that school paper for fun.

"I carried the paper around school and delivered it there as a matter of my going to school. After six or eight months though, that paper busted from lack of funds.

"After that I got to carrying on Sundays the *Sunday Mercury*, a weekly literary publication here and I had a route . . . a small nice route, about 20 routes of the Chronicle today. I played Tom Sawyer on the boys. I got a couple of boys to help me. . . . I kept these boys by ending up with a picnic, the bonus for walking around all night. . . .

A Moment for Enterprise

"While running the *Dramatic Chronicle* my brother and I were constantly reading books on newspapers and studying how to enlarge our newspaper, and night after night we discussed the question of turning the

Dramatic Chronicle into a daily newspaper."

(The brothers agreed on an economy program with Charles to draw only \$15 and "Mike" \$10 a week, placing all the rest into the bank.)

"The reputation of the *Dramatic Chronicle* for enterprise was emphasized when Abraham Lincoln was shot. I was going down town in the morning to the office at 6:30 or 7 o'clock and saw the news on the telegraph bulletin board.

"I went right down and got out an extra. No other paper got out an extra. They were all dead and had no enterprise like that of the present. The news of the assassination of Abraham Lincoln was the biggest story in the world but they couldn't see it.

"We got out a second and a third extra when eight or 10 lines more news came and could be put in it.

"Then we had a riot in the city. The mob rushed to be revenged on the copperhead papers that had attacked Lincoln. The *Examiner*, as it is called now, was then called the *Democratic Press*. After the crowd got there it surged into the offices and picked up the cases and threw them out of the front window.

"When the paper was republished it was called the *Examiner*. The owners did not dare to republish it as the *Democratic Press*. It was sometime after the riot before the *Examiner* was published."

(The Chronicle was then in its first year. The *Examiner* was launched on the ruins of the old *Democratic Press* Dec. 12, 1865. Fifteen years later the property was bought by Senator

George R. Hearst, reportedly for \$10,000. Its accumulated losses over the 1880-87 period were reportedly \$250,000. The *Examiner* became the property of William Randolph Hearst March 4, 1887.)

Sense and Judgment

Back in 1865 "after our paper began to get the reputation for sense and judgment and made a name for itself as a free paper," the young partners received a \$50,000 offer for a half interest from Henry Badham, Mr. de Young recalled.

"I want to turn the Chronicle into a daily paper," the autobiography states in quoting Mr. Badham, described as "one of the most prominent men in San Francisco."

"I want to turn the *Dramatic Chronicle* into a daily paper. You two boys run it and I want to own half the paper.

"We listened and said: 'Don't want it. If there is anything in our abilities to develop the business, we want the whole of it ourselves. We won't take the money.'

(Next the de Young brothers were warned not to start a daily newspaper and were offered direction of the *San Francisco Call* "as ostensible owners" and with a half interest, the autobiography tells. They refused.)

"Then came the smash. The *Bulletin* and the *Call* made a deal to smash us. It was not unexpected and their threats had given us plenty of warning. But it turned out to be the greatest thing that ever happened to the Chronicle.

"The *Call* and the *Bulletin*



The century-old San Francisco Chronicle began as a freely-distributed "local, critical and theatrical" daily record of affairs called the Daily Dramatic Chronicle.

arranged with a large number of interior papers of the state for a simultaneous attack on the Chronicle. The stories published attacked the reliability of the paper, of its news, and particularly of its news of prize-fights and sporting events with which, at that time, we were having a great deal of success in arousing the interest of the public.

Attack Backfires

"Their attack made the Chronicle as a newspaper. The stories they carried about us, the wide publicity they gave us, interested the public in the Chronicle and made readers investigate.

"They found they had only advertised to the whole state a San Francisco paper that previously had not been very well known. . . . That was the beginning of our country circulation.

"This was a bright spot in our career—we have had bright spots all the way through as well as great troubles—but this was the one that brought us success."

"We financed the change from The Dramatic Chronicle to The Daily Chronicle entirely on our own resources.

"To raise money to start the Daily Chronicle we sold our circulation routes in advance . . . at so much a name for every subscriber, alive and kicking, at the end of six months' time. (A small deposit of \$50 to \$100 was required of each carrier.) In six months they paid \$2.50 for a name. The money became due at a period of the hardest times we ever saw."

Beat Hearst to Site

The story to which Mr. de Young devoted the greatest de-

tail was how the Chronicle secretly obtained a building which William Randolph Hearst had leased for his Examiner.

"Mike" de Young had long looked forward to the day when this would become the Chronicle Building site. The owner had never evidenced any desire to sell. Mr. de Young learned that Mr. Hearst had leased the downtown corner but the lease was not yet in effect because the owner was waiting Senator Hearst's endorsement.

Obtained Financing

Mr. Hearst's father declared the rental too high. This gained Mr. de Young opportunity to win a grudging assent to a "day or two option" to buy for \$250,000. He had hoped the price would be \$100,000. In an amazing series of moves he obtained financing.

The building acquired at Market and Kearny Streets was torn down for "the first metal frame building on the Pacific Coast."

The property transfer was an exciting moment for the Chronicle publisher. Twenty years later the 10-story building was gone. The 1906 fire and earthquake destroyed the building "and all the property I owned in San Francisco, except my home," the autobiography states.

Up from the Ruins

"The whole thing was staggering and depressing. . . . Where I am looking now there isn't a single business house left of all my advertisers, so there are no advertisers left. The largest part of my circulation was in the burnt district, so the bulk of my subscribers are gone."

"After a long and thoughtful consideration of the thing, the usual spirit that endows the average human being, pride, self-pride, came uppermost.

"I said to myself: 'The Chronicle is my child, my creation. I built it up to what it is. Wouldn't it be a crime to myself to go into some other business and see it destroyed?' . . .

"I finally came to the momentous conclusion that I would keep the Chronicle alive if I took the coat off my back and pawned it."

Mr. de Young wired for \$20,000 from his new York banker.

20 Page Edition

"I started to run the Chronicle as I did before, issuing as large a paper as I could get out, and surprised everyone by getting out a 20-page edition."

Business developed immediately. Advertising had to be rationed. No advertiser was allowed to have as much as a half-page.